Point A to Point B:
Knowing the Outcomes You Want and Getting Students There

Note: Oftentimes, new teachers do not think through the purpose of the activities they create or how those activities connect to one another.

I often ask – what is the educational purpose of this activity? What do you want students to know or be able to do as a result of performing this activity?

We have to know the answer to these questions in order to build meaningful and effective lessons.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Sometimes, this idea is reflected in an objective written like this:
• Students will be able to respond to the journal prompt
• Students will create a poster

Neither of these are strong objectives</td></tr>
<tr><td>Students will be able to respond to the journal prompt</td><td>• The point is not for kids to respond. That is something they are physically doing but it is just a method of answering.
• The point is for them to do something important (higher order thinking) in that response – evaluate, critique, reflect, analyze, create
• We are not assessing responding, we are assessing what they say and do in that response.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Students will create a poster</td><td>• In this case, creating is not higher order thinking, it is simply transposing.
• There is nothing being learned when a student writes the same information recorded one place onto another.
• What we want is for students to do something with the fact-based information – create, analyze, examine, critique, apply, predict.</td></tr>
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- In these cases, you haven't thought through the outcomes you are hoping for (which should be guided by your unit goals).
- You haven't answered your own questions or thought about the steps students will take.
- If you had thought through the desired outcome and answered your own questions, you would see these objectives and their corresponding activities are not meaningful or based in higher order thinking.
- You need to know where you are taking the students from start to finish in a lesson. If your warm up doesn't make sense or takes them to an undesired outcome, you are setting your students up to fail in the remainder of the lesson.

Now, in other cases, when teachers say, let's brainstorm and web diagram OR let's have a discussion, they don't plan

- The end point or hoped for outcome (what do you want students to know or be able to do by the end of this discussion)
- The questions you will ask and answers you want to share with students in order to get them to the hoped for outcome.

In some cases, teachers have a series of wonderful questions, but they are all pushed together into a single discussion. In the case below, all 6 questions are part of a single warm up activity. But when we break these questions down, we see that proceeding down the path of discussing the answers takes us in wildly different directions to very different outcomes. Each of these questions below could yield an entire lesson and an entirely different lesson with different outcomes.

Questions

- How can music be a tool for social change or political expression? Can you think of any historical examples?
- How does music influence our emotions and mental well-being?
- Have you experienced any therapeutic effects of music?
- What criteria do you use to evaluate the quality or impact of a piece of music? What makes these criteria valuable or trustworthy?
- What motivates individuals to create music?
- How does the process of making music differ from simply consuming it?

Question	Discussion of this question leads to a lesson about:
How can music be a tool for social change or political expression? Can you think of any historical examples?	• Social change – what is it, how does it happen • Social change – specific examples of music • Political expression – what does this mean • History – examples, cause and effect
How does music influence our emotions and mental well-being? Have you experienced any therapeutic effects of music?	• Personal emotions and well being • Music's effect on our emotions and well being • Mental health and expression • Therapy and music's effects
What criteria do you use to evaluate the quality or impact of a piece of music? What makes these criteria valuable or trustworthy?	• Elements of music • Evaluating music based on existing elements of music • How an individual evaluates music • How is this evaluation different from personal opinion
What motivates individuals to create music? How does the process of making music differ from simply consuming it?	• Music creation • Intention and motivation behind music creation • Identity – what is it, what is yours, how is identity reflected in music • Author's intended message

Let's look at another example

Course: Social Studies with a focus on music

Here is one of the unit goals:
Students will better understand how music is used as a political, social, and cultural tool in different world cultures and evaluate that music in relation to other cultures and their own musical experiences.

This question is being asked in a lesson in week 1:
Tell me everything you know about the Civil Rights movement

This question can work really well for a brainstorming and web diagraming scenario.

- It is a big picture topic, lots of answers that students can come up with
- The answers to this question will give you a clear picture of students' prior knowledge

However, at first glance, this question doesn't have much relation to a course on music. Not outwardly. It is clearly meant to work toward meeting part of this unit goal, but there is no context. Why are we answering this question as students? How does it relate to a class on music? We have to build to get there, both in terms of this lesson and across the weekly plans.

If we do not plan appropriately, where does this discussion go?
Right now, it could go in a million different directions. Which direction do you want to take students? What is the end point you are trying to reach? What foundational knowledge are you trying to share with students? What page do you want them all on before you continue?

You need to:

- Think about the outcome – what do you want students to know or be able to do by the end of this unit?
- What are the answers to your question – what are the topics, key terms, ideas you want to make sure you cover in this discussion.
- How do those topics, key terms, and ideas connect to each other and how do they connect to the larger topic of the class (music).
- How will you take student answers (especially those that veer off your intended target) and fit them into the larger discussion that is driving toward a specific end point?